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PROMOTION AND PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS:
STATUS OF THE INTERNATIONAL COVENANTS ON HUMAN RIGHTS;
HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

Written statement* submitted by the International Rehabilitation Council for Torture
Victims (ICRT), a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is
circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[14 January 2002]

*This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the
submitting non-governmental organization(s).



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ENG

This year, 2002, marks the 15th anniversary of the UN Convention against Torture's entry into force. This year, the International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims (IRCT) is again leading a global appeal to call upon the governments of the world to ratify and adhere to the Convention, and in so doing, to further contribute to bringing an end to a world in which torture is tolerated.

To date, no more than 127 States have ratified this important UN Convention. Throughout 2002, the IRCT, on behalf of the Coalition of International NGOS against Torture (CINAT), will target those countries yet to ratify the Convention, as well as those States Parties which do not recognise the full competence of the UN Committee against Torture. In particular, the appeal will call upon governments to empower the Committee to accept and consider individual communications (Art. 22). The IRCT will call upon all States Parties to fully comply with the obligations in the Convention to combat torture and to work towards its prevention.

The IRCT acknowledges those 13 countries which did respond to the global appeal in 2001. Several countries have already taken action in response to the campaign; others have indicated that they intend to do so in the near future. The IRCT calls upon all countries which have so far remained silent to respond to the campaign in the near future, declaring their intentions regarding the ratification of the UN Convention against Torture. The global appeal, coordinated by the IRCT, is aiming for no less than 130 States Parties to the Convention by the end of 2002.

The IRCT welcomes recent progress in the UN working group charged with the elaborating an optional protocol to the UN Convention on Torture. The IRCT supports the inclusion of both national and international elements in the protocol, so long as the full powers of the international body are maintained; this is critical for the Protocol to have real value.

In this regard, the IRCT wishes to emphasise the work that many rehabilitation centres are already doing, either informally or in partnership with national authorities, in the prevention of torture and in undertaking preventive prison visits. Rehabilitation personnel have special expertise in the treatment, documentation, investigation and, not least, prevention of torture. The IRCT is concerned that a weak optional protocol may indirectly threaten the ongoing role of rehabilitation personnel in undertaking prison visits and other torture prevention initiatives.

In a number of countries, health professionals have been targeted and subjected to harassment, arbitrary arrest or violence, due to their ability to identify and document cases of torture. Over the past twelve months, members of the IRCT network in Congo, Mexico, Sudan, Indonesia and Turkey have faced threats. The IRCT is strongly committed to securing the protection of those working in support of victims of torture. In this respect, the IRCT therefore calls on all Member States to provide their full support to the work of the UN Special Representative on Human Rights Defenders. The IRCT further encourages all Member States to promote the ongoing implementation of the UN Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms.

The International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims (the IRCT) is an independent, international health professional organisation, which promotes and supports the rehabilitation of torture victims and works for the prevention of torture worldwide. The IRCT collaborates with, or supports, more than 200 rehabilitation centres or programmes in every region of the world. It is the

strong conviction of the IRCT that the prevention of torture and the rehabilitation of torture victims, is an essential component in efforts to promote of peace and security, the prevention of conflict and the reconciliation of former enemies.
